



Call for Participants:

# Sacred Places in a Post-secular and Globalized World

An international online  
research workshop

Deadline extended

December  
8–10  
2020

## Keynote speakers

**Prof. José Casanova**

Georgetown University

**Prof. Kim Knott**

Lancaster University

**Prof. Robert Orsi**

Northwestern University

Sacred places embody extensive repertoires of meanings and identities. Far beyond the specific realm of religion and pilgrimage, the sacred place is a prism through which we can examine the fabric of intellectual and social life. The perpetual need for sacred places, the ways they form and are shaped, and the wonder that underlies them can all help shed light on the culture in which we live.

The workshop, organized by the Sacredness, Religion and Secularization research cluster at the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, will examine sacred places in the global world in the era of post-secular culture. To that end, we wish to focus on the connection between the theological, historical, and material dimensions of sacred places, with an emphasis on three contemporary aspects: globalization, tourism, and technology. The current global situation caused by the coronavirus pandemic, which adds a new and destabilizing angle to all three aspects, will also be taken into consideration.

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Sacred places have always borne the tension between their local and their universal contexts. However, accelerated globalization has changed how we relate to the sacred place. These changes are generated by, and operate within, global, secularized, economic, and technological contexts that make the sacred place an intersection of diverse arenas and various motivations, not necessarily religious motivations in the common and traditional sense.

The increasing centrality of global tourism in contemporary culture (up until the current times) has influenced, and to a great extent has determined, the current role of the sacred place. Tourism exalts emotion, sensuous pleasure, material engagement, emotional attachment, and feelings of authenticity and enchantment. Thus, it serves as a global agent of the rise and change of religious sensitivities in our time. We will try to understand how the relations between post-secular societies, recreational tourism, and religious pilgrimage function, and how they affect the field and the sacred place itself.

Sacred places and pilgrimage are also affected by the Anthropocene – the age of humankind. Changes in the world order at the level of the global ecological system affect places such as mountains, forests, lakes, and other sites to which sacredness is ascribed. The influence of technology and science, which make it possible to visit a sacred place or to come into contact with it from afar, is relevant both to the sacred places themselves and to humankind's perception of itself in relation to the actual material place.

These issues have been deeply affected by the coronavirus pandemic. In particular, the pandemic has changed the conditions of both recreational and religious tourism and has placed severe constraints on pilgrimage and access to sacred places throughout the world. This situation raises thoughts as to the nature of the sacred and its relation to place in the most elementary sense; about local traditions of sacredness and about the relation of people to their immediate environment. Can the current conditions give rise to a re-localization of religious practice and a reconnection of communities to "their" sacred places? From a different perspective, what may be the effects of the old-new physical distance and separation imposed upon many believers from the sacred places of their traditions, after decades of accelerated globalization and world travel? In what ways, if at all, can technology be utilized to bridge this distance?

The discussions in the workshop will strive to understand the configurations and the physical, ritual, and ideological meanings of sanctity in a post-secular and global world and will aim to harness these insights for learning about the fundamental questions regarding secularization, secularism, nationalism, and religion in our time.

The **3-day workshop** will consist of three **Zoom** talks by the keynotes, followed by a discussion between the speakers and the participants.

To apply, please submit by **November 1, 2020**, a CV, a short description of research interests, and an abstract of 200–300 words for a paper on the topic of the workshop. The abstracts will be pre-circulated among the participants and the keynotes. Selected papers will be published in a leading journal in the field of religious studies, alongside the papers given by the keynotes.

For inquires and application, please  
contact Ido Harari: [ido@vanleer.org.il](mailto:ido@vanleer.org.il)